



## Take the Sting Out of the Ocean

While many do not fear the jellyfish sting, it can make a day at the beach less enjoyable. In fact, a jellyfish sting can cause reactions from moderate to severe: for some, it may just burn a little, but others may have difficulty breathing, chest pain, nausea, or more. Knowing what to look for to avoid stings and what to do if stung can help.

Jellyfish are gelatinous creatures that swim near the top of the water. It is their tentacles that are covered with nematocysts (sacs filled with venom) that cause the sting. Since they are non-aggressive, jellyfish do not attack; the stings are often accidental. One may swim into or carelessly handle a jellyfish and then suffer the consequences.

### Tips on avoiding jellyfish:

- According to eMedicinehealth.com, "some types of jellyfish have reproductive jelly gatherings 8 to 10 days after a full moon, thus there is an increase in the number of jellyfish found at that time." You may want to avoid swimming around that time.
- Do not pick up dead jellyfish; the nematocysts may still be alive and can still release toxins (even after they have dried up).
- Avoid going into known jellyfish-infested areas. You may check out local newspapers for reports on severity or ask a lifeguard. If you choose to swim in areas with high concentrations, know what type of jellyfish are common to the area and wear protective clothing.

### Treatment of Jellyfish Stings:

Regular household white vinegar seems to be the best solution. Soak or rinse the area in vinegar for 15-30 minutes to stop the nematocysts from releasing their toxins. If vinegar is not available, rinse in sea water or 70% isopropyl alcohol. Do not use fresh water. Fresh water will cause the nematocysts to continue to "fire" (release their toxin). For the same reason, at this point, **do not rub the area, apply ice or hot water.** Unseasoned meat tenderizer, baking soda, household ammonia, freshly sliced papaya, and lemon or lime juice may also prevent nematocysts from causing pain.

Remove tentacles with a stick or a pair of tweezers. Wear gloves if you have them available.

Apply shaving cream or a paste of baking soda and sea water to the area. Shave the area with a razor or credit card to remove any adherent nematocysts. The shaving cream or paste prevents nematocysts that have not been activated from releasing their toxin during removal with the razor. If no shaving supplies are available, sand and a shell can do the job too. Reapply vinegar (sea water or alcohol).

Eye stings should be rinsed with a commercial saline solution like Artificial Tears; dab the skin around the eyes with a towel that has been soaked in vinegar. Do not place vinegar directly in the eyes.

Mouth stings should be treated with 1/4 strength vinegar. Mix ¼ cup of vinegar with ¾ cup of water. Gargle and spit out the solution. Do not drink or swallow the solution.

For pain, take acetaminophen (Tylenol) 325 mg 1-2 tablets every 4-6 hours for pain; or Ibuprofen (Motrin) or Aleve every 8 hours for pain. Hydrocortisone cream can decrease skin irritation.

A jellyfish sting can produce an allergic reaction similar to a bee sting, so if there are any immediate signs of an allergic reaction, such as difficulty breathing, hives, nausea or vomiting, chest or abdominal pain; head to the nearest emergency room or call 911.